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THE CAPTAIN'S PREDICAMENT

—BY—

ALICE GAY JUDD.

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THE CAPTAIN'S PREDICAMENT

✢

A FARCE IN TWO ACTS

✢

By
ALICE GAY JUDD

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——Published by——

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Cast of Characters

Capt. Lawrence Harrington, a young army officer on his way to visit the Stannards.

Jack Stannard, the Captain's friend.

Barbara Stannard, Jack's sister and housekeeper.

Jean Weston, Barbara's friend and visitor.

Dr. Williams, a fussy, old village doctor.

Miss Molly Cushman
Miss Dorothea Drake
Miss Pauline Clemmons
} three gushing village girls.

Setting:—Living room ;usual furniture; large couch center back; large screen at right angles to wall between couch and door at left of couch.

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The Captain's Predicament

ACT I.

Scene--Living room in the Stannard's house.

(Enter Barbara and Jean, Barbara carrying a bowl of flowers which she places on center table..)

Barbara—There, Jeannie, that's the last touch. Doesn't the room look nice? It's been so long since the Captain had a real home, that I want the house to look very cheerful and comfortable.

Jean—(arranging couch cushions while Barbara talks) The house looks very nice, and the mistress, also. Captain Harrington ought to fall in love with Bab.

(Door opens suddenly and Jack hurries in, telegram in his hand.)

Jack—Girls, I've just had a telegram from Lawrence. He'll be here on the 9:30, and wants me to meet him with a car. He's sick.

(Both girls exclaim.)

Barb.—Sick! O, Jack! And think of all the things we've planned for him to do! And all the dinners and luncheons that he won't be able to eat. Poor fellow!

Jean—You'd better stop and get old Dr. Williams, Jack. Maybe it's something serious.

Jack—That's right. Williams will know just how to handle him. Say, girls, hadn't you better get something ready for him to eat, while I'm gone? He ought to have something to keep up his strength. Sick people can always have toast and tea. I must go, for it's almost train time. *(Exit.)*

Barb.—Isn't that just like a man? Make toast and tea while he's gone! We'd better be getting hot-water bottles and bandages and cracked ice. For goodness only knows whether he's broken his leg or got yellow fever.

Jean—O, Barbara, what if it should be yellow fever, or some other terrible disease! What *would* we do?

Barbara—Be quarantined, of course; and we would probably catch it, and then our hair would all come out, and you would lose your beautiful complexion.

Jean—*(clutching her face)* O, Bab, do you really think so? O, that miserable, inconsiderate man!

Barb.—But we don't know, yet, Jeannie.

Jean—But I feel it in my bones that that's the trouble.

Barb.—Well, maybe your bones will disappoint you, but let's be prepared, whatever comes.

(Exeunt.)

(Enter Jack and Dr. Williams, supporting Captain Harrington, in dressing gown and big overcoat, head bandaged, and groaning at every step. Behind them come Jean and Barbara.)

Dr. Williams—We'll put him right here on the couch, Jack. I'll see what's the matter with him before we put him to bed.

(Captain makes gesture of protest.)

Dr. W.—*(pompously)* Now, now, my dear sir, don't begin to worry. I know what is best for you

(Jean and Barb. make couch comfortable, and the men help the Captain to lie down.)

Dr. W.—Now, Captain, please tell me, as concisely as you can, exactly what happened.

Captain—*(speaking with difficulty)* The train stopped—at a little siding—to get—orders—from the—telegraph operator—and it was such—a beautiful moonlight—night—that I got out—to look around. Stumbled over something—and next thing I knew—was in berth—with my head bandaged—up—and porter and conductor—

Barb.—Oh, how dreadful!

Jack—Too bad, old fellow.

Jean—But it might have been worse—it might have been *yellow fever!*

Dr. W.—*(excitedly)* Precisely, precisely. *(Unties bandage and feels Captain's head.)* Not a scratch, you see, not a scratch. Concussion, just plain concussion of the brain. Very serious. *(Replaces bandage.)* Accounts for his high fever; he'll probably be delirious very soon. *(Runs his hands up and down patient's body and legs.)* No broken bones, I hope. Ah! *(Feels Captain's ankle.)* A sprain, a bad sprain—must be bound immediately. Miss Barbara, kindly hand me my case; it has bandages in it. Jack, you may assist me. *(Together they bandage ankle.)* Let me see your tongue. *(Patient puts out his tongue.)* Bad, very bad. *(Pokes thermometer in patient's mouth, and feels his pulse.)* Pulse one hundred and two. *(Pulls out thermometer and shouts excitedly)* Temperature one hundred and fifty!

(Barbara, Jean and Jack exclaim in horror.)

Dr. W.—Now, my dear young ladies, action! action! but be perfectly calm and quiet. Calmness is very necessary. Patient must be put to bed *immediately.*

Capt.—I won't! I—I'm better already! I *will not* go to bed!

Dr. W.—*(soothingly)* There, there, my dear sir, don't excite yourself. We will make a slight concession, and let you lie on the couch until you recuperate a trifle from your journey. But we must make haste to care for you. Now, young ladies, bring me cracked ice and hot water bottles—bandages—comforts. Hurry!

Barb.—We have the things all ready.

(Exeunt Barb. and Jean.)

Dr. W.—We will remove his overcoat.

Capt.—*(holding it tightly)* No, no, I won't have it taken off.

(Dr. W. steps behind Captain and motions significantly to his head. Jack nods sympathetically.)

(Enter Barbara and Jean, loaded with articles the Dr. asked for.)

Dr. W.—Now, my dear young ladies, the bag of ice for his feet—no, no, his *head!* Jack, put the hot water bottle on his ankle. He ought to have another on his stomach, to counteract the effect of the ice; the stomach is such a sensitive organ. Here, fix these pillows under his head. Now, cover him up with these comforts. *(All work rapidly as Dr. directs.)* Now, my dear sir, I'll leave you some medicine. *(Seats himself at table and opens bag.)* A glass of water, please, Miss Barbara, and two or three small dishes.

(Exit Barbara. Returns with glasses and dishes.)

Dr. W.—Now, let me think. *(Opens case and begins to take out medicines, speaks slowly and importantly.)* These pink pills are to be given every fifteen minutes, the brown ones every fifteen minutes, beginning ten minutes after the first pink one; these red ones, every twenty minutes, beginning between the pink and brown ones. The liquid in this glass *(Measures fluid into one glass of water.)* is to be given every half hour omitting when it comes in conjunction with one of the pink pills. And *this* liquid give every hour, omitting when it interferes with first liquid. I think that is perfectly clear, but you had better make a memorandum of it. I wish to be perfectly sure because of the effect on his brain. If he becomes delirious or stupid, send for me. I'll drop in this evening, anyway, and give him a sleeping powder. Now, don't be alarmed at any symptom which may appear. This is a very serious case, but I hope to pull him through. *(Shakes head sadly; gathers up his bottles and case.)* Good-day, Captain. Good-bye, Jack—young ladies, I will give you further directions in the next room.

(Exeunt Barbara, Jean and the Doctor. As door closes, the Capt. starts up; throws off covers, slings ice-bag and hot water bottle in middle of room.)

Capt.—Jack, for the love of mercy, take these things away! There's not a thing the matter with me.

Jack—(rushing to push him back on couch) There, there, old fellow, you're all right. Just lie still—you'll be well pretty soon.

Capt.—But, Jack, I'm *not* sick. There's not a thing the matter with me..

Jack—(rushing to door) Doctor! Doctor!

(Doctor, Barb. and Jean rush in.)

Jack—(Points to patient crouching on couch then to articles on floor.) The spell came on just as you left.

Dr. W.—(excitedly) Just as I said; delirium. *(Speaks soothingly to Capt.)* Lie down again. There's a good fellow, and let us cover you up.

Capt.—But, Doctor! *(Looks at girls; lies down, with his face to the wall.)*

Dr. W.—(Puts ice-bag and hot water bottle in place; covers patient more securely than before.) Very sad case; very sad, indeed, but rest assured I will do my best.

(Exeunt Dr., Barb. and Jean.)

(Jack stands, staring down at Capt.)

Capt.—Jack, are you there?

Jack—Yes, yes, you're all right, Laurie.

Capt.—(Groans.) Jack, please listen and let me tell you. *(Door at side of room behind screen opens softly and Barb. and Jean come in carrying a tray with toast and tea. They hear Captain's voice, and Barb. motions Jean to stop and listen.)*

Jack—Never mind, old fellow, you'll be all right in a day or two.

Capt.—(turns toward Jack and speaks earnestly.) Jack, I'm not delirious or crazy, or any of the things that old M. D. said about me. I'm not sick or hurt any place. It's the craziest thing you ever heard of; if it was anyone but myself, I'd laugh. I did get out of the train it was such a beautiful, moonlight night, and I just slipped on my shoes, and put my overcoat over my dressing gown, and while I was looking at the landscape, that blamed old train melted away into the scenery, and there I was, on

that little platform, not a thing in sight but the telegraph operator's hut, and my clothes and money and everyhing else, traveling north at the rate of fifty miles an hour. O, yes, laugh! *(Jack begins to roar.)* It's awfully funny! Funniest thing I ever heard of. Maybe you'd like to try it. Wasn't a thing to do but stay there till the next through train came along. The operator wired you to meet me, and my conductor to express my baggage here. Then we made up a cock-and-bull story to tell the incoming conductor about my having had a dreadful fall, etc., and he and the porter put me into a berth, and waited on me as though I was precious enough to wrap in cotton. Beastliest business I ever heard of. But the worst of it is *(Capt. sits up eneregetically.)* I haven't got a thing to wear, not a single piece of dry goods, until my clothes get here—unless you can lend me something—and I haven't had a thing to eat, and I'm so hungry I could tie myself up in a knot.

(Girls listen and whisper together.)

Jack—You're welcome to anything I've got, Laurie, but I'm afraid it wouldn't fit you. Maybe *(laughing)* Bab could take up a few seams for you.

(Barbara shakes her head vigorously.)

Capt.—(starting up excitedly) Jack Stannard, don't you ever dare tell those girls! I'll run a bayonet through you some dark night, if you do. No, there's nothing I can do but play the invalid till my clothes get here.

(Girls laugh silently and whisper.)

Jack—Well, you can't get well too fast, old man, or they'll be on to you in a minute. Those girls are sharp, all right.

(Girls nod emphatically.)

Capt.—Holy Smoke! Have I got to be laid up here for a week or so, and miss a lot of good times just to keep up this fable?

Jack—(grinning) Looks like it. But you'll have plenty of good times, all right, all right. All the girls in town'll be in to bring you flowers and jelly, and read you poetry.

Capt.—Let 'em try; just let 'em try! I'll scare them to death—have delirium and everything else. Great Jehosophat! I'm empty clear through. If I could only have one good meal!

(Girls look at each other and shake heads energetically.)

Jack—Never mind, old man, I'll smuggle things in to you. Cheer up, sad heart, the worst is yet to come.

(Barb. and Jean open and close the door noisily, and Capt. falls on couch, while Jack covers him up.)

(Enter Barb. and Jean.)

Barb.—(severely) I thought I heard voices, Jack. The Dr. said the patient must have *perfect quiet.*

Jean—And here is the ice-bag and hot water bottle on the floor! What does that mean?

Jack—(stammering) Why—er—a—why, he got delirious and threw them around.

Jean—Poor fellow! Have you been giving him his medicine, Jack?

Jack—I never thought of it.

Barb.—(sarcastically) A fine nurse you are! What if the Captain should die through your neglect?

Capt.—(weakly) I feel better now, much better.

Barb.—O, I am *so* glad. But you must be *very careful.* The doctor thinks you'll be confined to the house for several weeks. *(Glances at Jean.)* Now, if you can sit up for a *very* few minutes, you can have something to eat.

(Capt. sits up quickly. Barb. runs to him.) No, no! You mustn't move alone. Jack, you and Jean help me.

(Jean arranges pillows and Jack helps Capt. to sit up.)

Jean—Don't you think he ought to have a pill?

Barb.—By all means. *(Consults Dr.'s directions on table.)* A pink one first. Here, Captain. *(Gives him a pill.)* Now you shall have our lunch. *(Brings chair to side of couch; holds tray on lap and begins to feed the Capt.*

small bits of toast, and spoonfuls of tea. Jean straightens up table and room.)

Capt.—I can feed myself perfectly, Miss Stannard; I always have done it. I wouldn't put you to so much trouble for anything in the world.

Barb.—Oh, it's no trouble at all, Captain. I'm perfectly delighted to do it. Just pretend you're in a hospital in France, and I'm a Red Cross nurse taking care of you. I was perfectly crazy to go overseas as a nurse, but they wouldn't take me, and now here I have an injured army officer brought to my very door. Isn't it wonderful?

(Jack has sudden convulsion of coughing.)

Barb.—Jean, you and Jack had better go and have your lunch now, I'll come presently.. Jack is too noisy for a sick room.

(Exeunt Jean and Jack.)

(Capt. finishes eating.)

Barb.—How do you feel, now?

Capt.—I have such a—a—faint feeling right here. *(Puts hand on stomach.)*

Barb.—*(apparently alarmed)* Oh, your heart! I must have given you too much to eat. I'll give you another pill; it's time for your brown one now. You must lie down. *(Capt. objects.)* Yes, you must. I'll sit here and give you your medicine. *(Helps him lie down and covers him up; seats herself.)*

Capt.—I can't tell you how sorry I am, Miss Stannard, to make such a beastly lot of trouble for you; you'll never want me to visit you again. But I'll be all right as soon as—er—I mean in a day or two.

Barb.—Oh, you poor man! You don't realize. Why, Captain, it will be *weeks* before you can be up. The doctor considers it very serious. You might have been killed. Of course, we're awfully sorry about your visit being spoiled, for we had planned dances and picnics and dinners; and there are lots of pretty girls in town, Captain.

Capt.—I can believe that there are at least two, anyway.

Barb.—That was very nice of you, Captain. But—Oh, it is time for you to have a pill. *(Gets red one from dish and gives it to him.)*

Capt.—Miss Barbara—

(Enter Jean.)

Jean—How is the Captain, Barbara?

Capt.—Oh, I'm ever so much better. Just miles and miles better.

Jean—Then I'm going to let the girls come in just for a second. They're *so* interested

Capt.—*(desperately)* Oh, Miss Jean!

Jean—*(opens door)* Come in, girls.

(Enter Miss Molly Cushman, Miss Dorothea Drake, Miss Pauline Clemmons.)

Barb.—*(rising)* Girls, you must be very, very quiet, and stay but a moment. Miss Cushman, Miss Drake, Miss Clemmons—Captain Harrington. *(Capt. bows wearily, girls smile and bow gushingly.)*

Miss Cushman—Oh, Bab, dear, isn't it romantic? Think of having a wounded army officer at your very door. It's just like a novel.

Miss Clemmons—And he might have been killed! Think of all he escaped in France, to almost meet death in his native land. It makes me shiver with horror at the thought.

Miss Drake—Was the concussion very bad, Captain Harrington? Dr. Williams told us you have one. I should love to see it. I never saw a concussion. You know, I'm just daffy about nursing. I think I shall study it; it is so interesting and romantic.

Jean—Do sit down, girls. *(Places chairs.)*

Barb.—Time for your medicine, Captain. *(Gives him spoonful of liquid.)*

Miss Clemmons—See how quietly he takes it. Some men are so disagreeable when they're sick.

Miss Cushman—Do tell us how you felt, Captain, when you found what had happened to you, almost as though you were still in battle, I suppose.

Capt.—I felt like the—er—um—thirty cents.

Jean—Just like a Susie Damn, you know. Knocked over and bobbed up serenely.

Miss Drake—Oh, Jean, how can you joke about it? Because it wasn't serenely at all. His dignity must have been terribly hurt.

Barbara—Oh, no, it was his head, not his dignity.

(Capt. squirms uneasily.)

Miss Drake—Well, no one need ever tell me that army officers aren't brave. Just see how nobly he bears his suffering, and with that cloth tied around his head, too.

Girls—(exclaiming) Poor man!

Miss Cushman—(Rises and goes to couch) Captain, if you would only allow me to smooth away the pain from your brow, my friends think my touch is really magnetic.

Capt.—No doubt; no doubt.

Barb.—What's so soothing to man's infirmities as the touch of a woman's hand?

Miss Drake—That is sadly true, dear Barbara.

Miss Clemmons—Have you ever tried the beneficial effect, Captain Harrington, of having some one read poetry aloud to you? The rythmical cadence of the lines is like soothing music, and lulls the mind to rest ere you realize the comfort that is being wrought in your behalf. I brought a book of poems with me; my own composition, *(produces book from fancy silk bag.)* and if you would like to have me, I will read a few selections.

Capt.—(Throws covers from him and springs up, wildly waving his arms.) Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears! Oh, Demosthenes, prince of orators! He was a Bayard, without fear and without reproach! My only regret is, I have but life to give for my country! *(Falls back weakly on couch and mumbles to himself. Girls scream, spring to feet and stand horrified.)*

Barb.—It's the delirium again! Run for Dr. Williams! Call Jack! Hurry! Hurry!

(Exeunt Jean and Miss Drake, Miss Clemmons and Miss Cushman help Barb. lay Capt. down: fan him, etc.)

(Dr. Williams, Jack, Jean and Miss Drake rush in.)

Dr. W.—What's this I hear? Precisely what I said. Brain badly affected; perfect quiet necessary; calm and peaceful surroundings. And what do I find? Patient all excited; feverish condition; much suffering. Room full of giddy, noisy girls, talking and laughing, fairly shouting. I should think you would have enough sense not to behave so outrageously with a sick person.

Barb.—Dr. Williams! Please remember you are talking to *my friends!*

Miss Drake—(putting handkerchief to her eyes) You are a cruel man. I shall not stay to be insulted. The Captain will probably die, anyway, and you might let us soothe his last moments. He certainly seemed to be enjoying himself. *(Sweeps out of room and slams door.)*

Dr. W—(Jumps as door slams) Confound that—excuse me, young ladies. *(Bows to Miss Clemmons and Miss Cushman.)* If it would not be forcing to great an affliction upon you, would you do me the kindness to absent yourselves from this room long enough for the Captain to recuperate after his period of rejoicing?

Miss Cushman—(with dignity) I never stay where I can plainly see I am not wanted.

Miss Clemmons—I wish you joy, Barbara, dear, both of your patient and your doctor.

(Exeunt both girls.)

Jack—Bravo! Bravo!

Jean—I am ashamed of you, Jack, I shall not speak to you for twenty-four hours.

Dr. W.—Now, Miss Barbara, let this nonsense cease. I shall do what I can for the patient, and I expect you and Miss Jean to do the same. No more pink teas for awhile. Now, Captain, we will take off your overcoat. *(Captain*

pulls it tightly around him.) Just let us take it off now, there's a good fellow. We'll take care of it for you. *(Aside to Jack and the girls.)* It's just a delirious fancy —we must be gentle with him. *(He and Jack remove the overcoat.)* Now, Miss Barbara, some fresh, cool pillows, another ice-bag, and a palm-leaf fan.

(Exeunt Barbara and Jean.)

Dr. W.—Now, Jack, don't you let those other girls come here again, before the captain is well. If you do, I wash my hands of the whole affair. I'll not be responsible for the Captain's condition with a lot of silly young women around.

(Enter Barb. and Jean, carrying articles.)

Dr. W.—You are doing splendidly, young ladies, splendidly. Haste is always necessary in a case like this, but too much haste makes waste. Now, we will have a fresh pillow under his head; tighten the bandage on his brow; put the ice-bag at the base of the brain; one hot water bottle at his feet, the other on his stomach. *(Jack and girls help arrange the Capt.)* Now, I will give him a spoonful of this liquid; and then, Miss Barbara, I want you to fan him till he goes to sleep. He is calm and composed, now; cool and comfortable, and I want him to remain so. Give him his medicine according to directions, if he should be wakeful; if he sleeps, it won't hurt him to do without it. Tomorrow he may have four raw eggs and a quart of milk. I will come early in the morning. I hope he will still be alive.

(Exit Dr. W.).

(Barb. stands at head of couch and fans Capt. Jean picks up magazine; seats herself at side of stage; Jack comes near her and tries to talk.)

Jack—I say, Jean, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings about those old girls—er—excuse me, I mean, your friends.

(Jean continues to read, and doesn't answer.)

Jack—(trying to take magazine) You're not really and truly mad, are you, Jean?

Barb.—Jack, stop bothering Jean, and stop talking. The Captain is almost asleep. Yes, *(Bends and listens to his breathing.)* he is. Now, Jack, Jean and I are tired out. We're going to rest a little, and you sit here by Captain Harrington.

(Exeunt Jean and Barb. very softly.)

Capt.—*(Throws off covering and stands up.)* Jack, for the love of Heaven, help me! I'll be a stark, staring, crazy lunatic if this keeps up twenty-four hours longer. I'm so hungry I ache. I can't tell my stomach from my back. And four raw eggs and a quart of milk tomorrow! Jack, I *am* crazy! You'd better send me off to the lunatic asylum; I can't stand it any longer. I'm beginning to see things.

Jack—*(Walks up and down with hands in pockets, thinking deeply.)* There's only one thing to do, Laurie. Your baggage will be here tomorrow, and, as soon as you get our clothes, you'll just have to get well.

Capt.—It won't do, Jack. I can't get well so soon. Why? Why, what would Barbara think of me? And Miss Jean? They'd never speak to me again.

Jack—Cheer up, old man, I've got it, the very thing.

Capt.—Hurry, hurry, before I fade away.

Jack—You shall get well as soon as your clothes come. Now, listen to me. But it will all be owing to Dr. Williams' medicine—and the girls' care. It will be a *wonderful* recovery. That'll just suit the old duffer; he thinks he's the whole push, anyway, and of course the girls will be in raptures to think their care has done so much for you. Now, what do you think of that scheme? Of course, you'd have to be a bit languid and droopy for a day or two, just enough to be interesting and then you'll be as right as a cricket. But you must make it look something wonderful; spread your gratitude on as thick as—as—the puffs on Miss Dorothea Drake's head.

Capt.—Jack, you're a brick. You bet I'll do my part, all right. *(Rises; goes to Jack and gives him a shake.)* Say, old fellow, order me five pounds of broiled steak for breakfast, good and rare; a dozen fresh rolls, half a dozen grape fruit, and a gallon of good, black coffee. *(Both laugh loudly.)*

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Place—Same as Act I. Time—Next morning.

Capt.—(propped up on couch.) Why the deuce doesn't that crazy Jack come? I heard the expressman bring my trunk an hour ago.

(Door opens carefully. Enter Jack, carrying small traveling bag.)

Capt.—(eagerly) Do you always travel like a snail? Can I go and get my clothes on now?

Jack—(Sits on edge of table and shakes head sadly.) The enemy has routed us—we're done for.

Capt.—(aghast) You don't mean—

Jack—That's just what I do mean, though. My dear little sister likes to be a nurse; thinks you're just the finest patient ever was; isn't going to let you get away until you get well; she isn't going to be responsible for your dying; no, sir! You stay here with your dressing gown on till the Doctor says the word.

Capt.—(Clasps both hands to his head.) Oh, ye snakes and little toads! How in the name of all the martyrs and ministers of grace, am I going to stand it? Another week! Another day! Another hour! Jack, suppose those girls, those three, sweet, shy creatures should come back and read me poetry? Just *suppose!*

Jack—They're coming, all right—I heard Jean say so.

Capt.—Then, I'll just expire now and be done with it. Send for the undertaker. I leave you my undying affection, Jack, and you can divide my belongings as you see

fit. Perhaps you'd better give my clothes to Barbara, and tell her if it hadn't been for her cruel, hardened heart, I might still be inside of them. *(Lays himself flat on couch and folds hands.)*

Jack—You might show a little gratitude; I've brought you something to eat. Perhaps you won't want it if you're going to expire.

Capt.—*(Jumps to feet.)* Who said expire? Bring forth my food, unruly knave.

Jack—I couldn't get very much. I think Bab had locked every thing up, and I was afraid she would find out what I was doing. I'll move the table and put the screen around you, and then I'll mount guard. *(Moves table in front of couch, and sets screen between them and the rest of the room. Opens satchel and sets two sandwiches, some salad and a small tin pail of ciffee on table.)*

Capt.—Never, never, did food look so good to me.

Jack—You eat, and I'll sit over there and keep watch. If anyone comes in, don't be scared unless I whistle "The Last Rose of Summer." Then you'd better be peacefully sleeping.

(Capt. nods and begins to eat ravenously. Jack takes book and sits in arm chair on other side of screen.)

(Enter Jean. Stops when she sees Jack.)

Jean—*(coldly)* Oh, are you here? Barbara told me to come in and take care of the Captain; but as you are here, I'll not stay.

Jack—*(jumping up)* Oh, please stay, Jean. Laurie is peacefully sleeping, and I haven't a thing to do.

Jean—No, I won't stay, for you would probably talk, and that would waken the Captain.

Jack—Of course I would talk.

Jean—Well, I wouldn't answer you.

Jack—Jean, are you really mad at me? I didn't mean what I said about those girls.

Jean—It was very unkind and un—ungentlemanly of you to say what you said about them. If you would say such things about them, how do I know what you would say about me?

Jack—Jean, you know what I say about you. Won't you please make up?

Jean—*(suddenly)* Did you ever make love to a girl, Jack?

Jack—Make love to a girl? Why—er—er—of course not. What an idea!

Jean—*(disappointedly)* Then, you can't help me, so I might as well go.

Jack—Can't help you? How in creation could my making love to a girl help you? I'd try, if you'd let me, Jean.

Jean—You see, our club is going to give a play, and, as we're all girls, some of us have to be men, and I'm one. I have to make love to a girl and I don't know how. You needn't laugh; it's perfectly ridiculous the way I do it, and I thought you—you might show me how, if you had ever tried it.

Jack—*(eagerly)* I could make a guess at it, and I'd love to help you.

(Capt. listens and grins; finishes eating and sits back on couch to listen.)

Jack—Now, what is it you want me to do?

Jean—Well, the man, that's me, you know, has to take the girl's hand very tenderly, and say: "Molly, I want to tell you something." And then he slips his arm around her and says: "I love you dearly." And the girl looks up and says: "Oh, Reginald!"

Jack—That's easy. You stand there and I'll come up to you. *(Suits actions to words.)* Jean, I want to tell you something.

Jean—No, no—You must say "Molly."

Jack—Let's do it over. *(Walks away and begins again.)* Molly, I want to tell you something. *(Slips arm about her.)* I love you dearly.

(Capt. sneezes.)

Jean—(catching Jack's arm.) Oh, Jack, what was that?

Jack—(angrily) Sounds like some old donkey.

Jean—Oh, was that all? Then, don't you think we'd better do it over again?

Jack—Why—a—certainly, I'd be delighted, only we had better speak very low, so as not to waken the Captain. *(Repeats action.)* Molly, I want to tell you something. I love you—dearly.

Jean—(shyly) Oh, Ja—Reginald, I mean.

(Door opens suddenly, and Barb., Miss Drake Miss Clemmons and Miss Cushman enter. All exclaim.)

All—Oh, pardon us! Excuse us! *etc.*

Jean—We—we—we're just rehearsing.

Jack—Yes, just rehearsing.

(Girls laugh loudly.)

Miss Drake—Oh, isn't that *too* delicious! Just rehearsing. Allow me to congratulate you, Jack.

Miss Clemmons—And Jean, too, you sly thing. *(Kisses her.)*

Miss Cushman—We won't tell a soul, not a soul. Isn't it perfectly dear?

Barb.—(Goes to them and holds her hands above them.) Bless you, my children.

Jean—But, Barbara—

Jack—Thanks, my dear sister. We didn't mean to tell anyone so soon, but it's all right, and we're dreadfully happy.

Barb.—I must tell the Captain, if he's awake.

Jack—Oh, say, Bab, wait a minute. I've got a letter for you. *(Searches his pockets, and whistles "Last Rose of Summer.")* Oh, no, I haven't either; must have laid it down some place. But I wouldn't disturb Laurie, if I were you.

(Capt. scrambles pail and traveling bag under table, and pretends to sleep.)

Barb.—(peeping around screen) Oh, he's asleep.

Capt.—(rousing) What—what did you say?

Barb.—I didn't mean to waken you. How are you, this morning?

Capt.—Beastly. Oh, er—I mean fine—just splendid—never felt better in my life. All owing to your care, too.

Barb.—I'm *so* glad. But, you know Jean helped, too; and these young ladies. They've come back this morning to see what they can do. You mustn't frighten them again.

Miss Drake—Naughty man, you frightened me nearly into spasms; I was positively speechless.

Capt.—Not permanently, I hope.

Miss Drake—Well, not entirely. Just see how forgiving I am. I've brought you these lovely flowers.

Capt.—You overwhelm me.

Barb.—Oh, how beautiful! Let me get a vase for them. *(Exit.)*

Miss Cushman—And I have brought you some custard. It is so good for invalids, and I made it myself.

Capt.—I don't know how to thank you for your kindness.

Miss Cushman—It will be enough thanks if you just hurry up and get well.

Miss Clemmons—You mustn't forget me, Capt. Harrington. I brought my poems. I thought you would feel more like hearing poetry today than yesterday. Probably your nerves are in a more settled condition; and poetry is *so* soothing. Jean, don't you think it would be sweet to fix the Captain's cushions comfortably, and while he is eating Molly's custard, I would read to him. It would be mental and physical nourishment at the same time.

(Enter Barb., carrying flowers in vase.)

Jean—Charming! Jack, help me fix the cushions.

(Jean and Jack go toward the Capt.)

Capt.—(protesting feebly.) But, I'm very comfortable, and—and—I don't believe I ought to eat the custard —it—it—might not agree with me, and I have to be very careful.

Barb.—Custard is fine for invalids; the doctor said you could have it. Molly, you had better feed him, for he is very weak, yet; and feed him slowly.

(Jean and Jack arrange cushions, then Jean sits on floor; Jack lounges; Molly sits beside Capt. and feeds him; Miss Drake fans him; Barb. embroiders, and Miss Clemmons sits in rocking chair and rocks violently as she talks and reads.)

Miss Clemmons—(opening book) What kind of poetry do you prefer, Captain?

Capt.—Martial; warlike; beating of drums and firing of cannon.

Miss Clemmons—Oh, dear! I'm so sorry. Mine are mostly verses on love, and "lines to my lady's eyes," and odes to spring. Here's one I am sure you will like. I have called it "The Spring Song." *(Begins to read dramatically.)*

Oh, lovely Spring,
When first you ring
Sweet bells of perfume,
And you bring
The birdlings that do sing and sing;
With half-closed eyes,
My soul, it sighs,
And rings sweet joy bells,,
That the skies are blue as my dear loved one's eyes.
Oh, wanton wind,
So sweet and kind,
When flaunting far,—"

Capt—Stop! *(He rises and the rest jump to feet in consternation.)* This can go no further! I will *not* eat another bite of custard; I will *not* be fanned; I will *not* listen to another line of poetry. I *will* have on my clothes and do as I please.

(All look from one to another, horrified.)

Miss Drake—(hysterically) His clothes? He's relapsed! He's relapsed! Oh, send for the doctor!

(Enter Dr. Williams.)

Dr. W.—What's all this? What's all this? What do you want me for?

Capt.—We *don't* want you—except to go home.

Dr. W.—Sir!

Capt.—That's what I said, and what I mean; and take your old pill-box with you.

Dr. W.—Don't be alarmed, Miss Barbara; it is just a phase of the disease. He really is almost demented.

Capt.—I will be demented if this lasts much longer. There's not a thing the matter with me—not a thing.

(All exclaim.)

Capt.—I just stepped off the train for a moment, and it went off and left me—well—not sufficiently clothed to continue my journey. So I planned to play invalid until my trunk arrived. But this—this—*doctor*—made such a diagnosis, that everybody thought I was about ready to die, and treated me accordingly; and I tell you I *won't stand* it.

Dr. W.—(pompously) Perhaps, young man you think I was not aware of your true condition.

Capt.—That's just what I do think.

Dr. W.—(to Jack and Barb.) My dear young friends, for my life-long friendship to your parents, I will forgive this *gentleman's* discourtesy. I hope he may soon recover the poise of mind he lost, along with his clothes. *(Exit)*

Miss Drake—Do you mean that there is nothing the matter with you; nothing at all?

Miss Clemmons—Except that you lost your—your clothes?

(Captain nods.)

Miss Cushman—It is the greatest swindle I ever heard of.

Miss Drake—Just think of the strain on our nerves; of the wasted sympathy, and my flowers.

Miss Cushman—And my custard.

Miss Clemmons—And my beloved poetry, that I brought to soothe his fevered mind.

Capt.—*(dejectedly)* I can only beg your forgiveness, ladies.

Miss Clemmons—We can never, never forgive you! Such gross imposture! I never wish to see you again. Barbara, you have our truest sympathy.

(Miss Clemmons, Miss Cushman and Miss Drake kiss Barb. and Jean good-bye and file slowly out; Miss Drake with handkerchief to eyes.)

Capt.—Jack, I think I had better go, too. I've abused your hospitality long enough.

Jack—Nonsense, old fellow! You haven't either; you couldn't help it. They'll get over it after a while.

Capt.—But think how I have treated you sister, and your sister's friend. Can you forgive me, Miss Barbara?

Barb.—*(Turns away.)* I don't know whether I can; it has been such a dreadful shock.

Jean—Just think how you have made us suffer.

Capt.—I know it—if I could just do something to let you know how sorry I am.

Jean—There is nothing you can do.

Barb.—Yes, there is one thing.

Capt.—*(eagerly.)* Tell me. I will do anything you ask.

Barb.—Truly?

Capt.—As truly as I stand here.

Barb.—Then forgive us.

Capt.—Forgive you?

Barb.—Yes, we heard you tell Jack—

Capt. and Jack—What! You knew it all this time?

Barb.—Yes, we heard you tell Jack all about it that first morning. So we decided to punish you for the fright you gave us. We made up dreadful stories and told Dr. Williams and the girls, and we were going to keep you an invalid as long as we could. Now, will *you* forgive us?

(Capt. walks up and down and stops near Barb.)

Jack—It was a mean trick for the girls to play on you, Laurie, but I reckon you're even now. Shake hands and forgive and forget *(Slips arm around Jean)* as Jean and I did.

(Capt. holds out his hand to Barbara, and she lays hers in it.)

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